

# III. Developing a Media Relations Plan

The media can play an important role in helping to maximize the impact of your traffic safety outreach efforts. In order to make sure that your interaction with the media is done cohesively and succinctly, not randomly or without direct purpose, the development of a comprehensive media relations plan is essential.

The purpose of a media relations plan is to help you take a step back, look at the “big picture” of how to interact with the media and then proceed with clarity and purpose. There are several components to any successful media relations plan. Creating a plan will help you and your organization stay on track and be more direct in working with the media.

## Media Relations Plan Components:

**Situational Analysis** — The first step in creating a media plan is to analyze your current “situation” or “environment.” Conducting a “situational analysis” will allow you to thoroughly examine the history, background and potential obstacles facing your issue or cause. This analysis also enables you to determine any positive or negative information about your external or internal environments. For example, if you are trying to promote safety belt compliance within a specific community, it will be important to ask the following questions:

- What is the current compliance rate?
- What are the common characteristics of those not wearing safety belts?
- Are there any existing programs focusing on the issue? If not, when was the last program implemented?
- Will your audience be accepting of messages or not?

**Goal** — What is the “overarching” end result you wish to achieve? In keeping with the above example, your goal might be to increase awareness about the importance of safety belt usage by generating news stories or it might be even broader — increasing safety belt compliance by 10 percentage points within a specific time frame. Your goal will provide the direction that your media relations strategy will take.

**Objectives** — Your media relations objectives relate directly back to your identified goal and should be measurable. They represent “how” you will meet your overarching goal. Objectives that would directly support the goal of increasing safety belt use could be:

- Generating positive awareness of the importance of safety belt compliance through broadcast and print media stories
- Directing audiences to child safety seat check-ups by utilizing traffic reporters
- Increase visibility of your organization through media relations (i.e. increasing calls to your organization)

**Target Audience** — Identifying specifically “who” you are trying to reach will help you in developing key strategies and what tactics (actual actions) will work best. Audiences can be the news media themselves, policy makers, community leaders or the general public. Often target audiences are broken down even further — children, parents, teens. If you are conducting an ongoing campaign about the dangers of impaired driving, your primary target audience would be comprised of the following groups of people:

- Motorists
- Repeat offenders
- Men, 18-34 years of age

Secondary target audience members might include policy makers and community leaders — in an effort to engage them in the topic.

**Strategy Development** — Now that your goal has been identified, it’s time to develop your strategy — your approach in meeting your goal and objectives. Strategies are not specific tactics, but rather they represent the “who” and “what” and the “how” of meeting your stated objectives. For example, if your objective is to generate more news coverage for your program, a strategy might be to foster relationships with appropriate reporters. The tactics within the strategy might be a news conference, letter to the editor or regular news releases.

**Key Message and Story Angle Development** — The first step in developing your story for media consumption is identifying the key messages you want to communicate to your target audience. What message do you want people to remember? Are you asking them to become aware of an issue, alter their opinion or change their behavior? By narrowing down your focus, and repeating your key messages often, you’ll have better success in reaching your audience.

Once you have determined your key messages, it’s important to develop your media angle or “hook.” What is it about your program or event that makes it newsworthy, links it to the community or affects the public? Is there a current trend affecting your issue? The more you can simplify the message, the more likely your chances for success.

**Tactics** — Tactics are specific tools used or actions taken to reach your target audience(s) and assist you in meeting your goal. Tactics always flow directly from your stated objectives and goal and they are never done simply for the sake of doing something. They are done with a specific intent and end-goal in mind.

Media relations is actually one type of tactic from a long list of communication disciplines. All of the sample media relations tools you will find in this media resource guide are different media relations tactics (news release, media advisory, news conference, etc). Which tactic(s) you use will, again, be based on your overarching goal and your identified target audience. For example, if you are trying to encourage the use of bicycle helmets among children of a specific ethnic population, the tactics used to communicate your message will be very different than if you were trying to reach adult men with anti-DUI messages. The channels through which these two groups receive information are likely to be very different.

**Timeline Development** — In order to keep all activities on track, it is helpful to develop a calendar or timeline for proactive media relations outreach. Your timeline can include everything from creating materials to distributing them to following up with reporters. If you have several special events planned throughout the year, establishing a working timeline to make sure that activities do not overlap is essential.

**Media List Development** — Lastly, it will be important to create an updated, comprehensive media list to help in distribution of your media materials. Please see Section V, “Media Relations Tools & Techniques,” for more information.

**Measurement and Evaluation** — It will be important to determine the effectiveness of the strategies and tactics that were used. Examples of how to measure media relations efforts include determining the number of stories placed, the frequency of placements, the “reach” or number of “impressions” each story had, the accuracy or positive position of the story, and the dollar value of each story had the same amount of airtime or space been purchased.

Formal methods of evaluation to assess how the target audience’s knowledge, attitude or actions were affected by the message(s) include:

- Mail surveys
- Telephone surveys
- Focus groups
- Mall intercept interviews
- Direct mailings

**Media Tracking** — Please email (preferred) or fax copies of all newspaper articles the day they appear to your Regional Coordinator AND Mike Marando, OTS Manager, Marketing and Communications by 9 a.m. at (916) 262-2960 or mmarando@ots.ca.gov. Print clips should include the following information:

- Name of publication
- Date
- Headline

Submit clips of radio and TV interviews to your Regional Coordinator as well.